

# ‘Reflection of Individual Freedom in Albert Camus’s The Outsider’

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Date of Submission: 01-03-2023

Date of Acceptance: 10-03-2023

**ABSTRACT:** Albert Camus is thoroughly associated with French literature in Europe. He is one of the major contributors of Existentialism philosophy in literature. His first novel ‘The Outsider’ published in 1942, deals with the thoughts of the Existentialism. The novel, ‘The Outsider’ reflects the essential principles of Existentialism that is Freedom or Free Will. It is through the action and works of the leading character of the novel Meursault, Albert Camus tried to show us the meaninglessness of the human life and the consequences of the Individual Freedom in human life. This paper will highlight how the Individual Freedom affects the life of a person, through the character Meursault; and also through his actions.

**Keyword:** Existentialism, Meaninglessness, Authenticity, Individual Freedom, Camus, Philosophy.

## I. INTRODUCTION :

Albert Camus was born on 7 November in 1913 and he died on 4 January in 1960. He was a French-Algerian philosopher, author, dramatist, and journalist. He got the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1957, at the age of 44. Some of his major works are The Outsider, The Plague, The Myth of Sisyphus, The Fall, and The Rebel. Camus was born in French Algeria to Pieds Noirs parents. He spent his childhood in a poor neighborhood and later studied philosophy at the University of Algiers. He was in Paris when the Germans invaded France during World War II in 1940. Camus tried to flee but finally joined the French Resistance where he served as editor-in-chief at Combat, an outlawed newspaper. After the war, he was a celebrity figure and gave many lectures around the world. Philosophically, Camus's views contributed to the rise of the philosophy known as absurdism. Many philosophers measured him an existentialist, even though he firmly rejected the term throughout his lifetime. In 1945, in an interview he says that, “No, I am not an existentialist, Sartre and I are always surprised to

see our names linked”. Though he rejects to consider himself as existentialist, yet his themes and outlook are after keen-sighted as examples of existentialism.

Camus himself said his philosophical origins lay in ancient Greek philosophy, Nietzsche, and 17th-century moralists whereas existentialism arises from 19th- and early 20th-century philosophy such as Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, and Heidegger. He also said his work, The Myth of Sisyphus, was a criticism of various aspects of existentialism. Camus was rejecting existentialism as a philosophy, but his critique was mostly focused on Sartrean existentialism, and to a lesser extent on religious existentialism. He thought that the importance of history held by Marx and Sartre was incompatible with his belief in human freedom. David Sherman and others also suggest the rivalry between Sartre and Camus also played a part in his rejection of existentialism. David Simpson argues further that his humanism and belief in human nature set him apart from the existentialist doctrine that existence precedes essence.

On the other hand, Camus focused most of his philosophy around existential questions. The absurdity of life, the inevitable ending (death) is highlighted in his acts. His belief was that the absurd—life being void of meaning, or man's inability to know that meaning if it were to exist—was something that man should embrace. His anti-Christianity, his commitment to individual moral freedom and responsibility are only a few of the similarities with other existential writers. More importantly, Camus addressed one of the fundamental questions of existentialism: the problem of suicide. He wrote: "There is only one really serious philosophical question, and that is suicide." Camus viewed the question of suicide as arising naturally as a solution to the absurdity of life.

## II. SOURCE:

While preparing this paper, the researcher uses Albert Camus's *The Outsider* as a primary source. And the researcher has taken various journals, references as secondary sources of research.

## III. METHODOLOGY :

The Sources of data that are used in this study will be both primary and secondary. The data will be acquired from various books, journals and articles.

Existentialism is a very broad area; a theory of existence. Few themes of Existentialism include; importance of the individual, importance of choice, meaninglessness and absurdity, authenticity, social criticism, importance of personal relation, Atheism and Religion.

Existentialism is a philosophical belief in which we are each responsible for creating purpose or meaning in our own lives. Our individual purpose and meaning is not given to us by Gods, governments, teachers or other authorities. Generally there are three core principles of existentialism: phenomenology, freedom, and authenticity. Critics and thinkers are quiet confused about the origin of the existentialist movement. Some critics think that, Dane Søren Kierkegaard is commonly regarded as the first existentialist philosopher, though he himself never used the term. It is quite clear that, the term, 'Existentialism' was evidently adopted by The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. Earlier thinkers like Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche retrospectively recognized as ancestors to the movement. Most of the works of Jean -Paul Sartre reflect the essence of the pure Existentialism.

So, we can assume that, Existentialism originated with the 19th Century philosophers Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, although neither used the term in their work. In the 1940s and 1950s, French existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus (1913 - 1960), and Simone de Beauvoir (1908 - 1986) wrote scholarly and fictional works that propagated existential themes, such as dread, boredom, alienation, the absurd, freedom, commitment and meaninglessness. To understand the philosophy of Existentialism, we need to go deep into the three core principles of Existentialism.

- Phenomenology :

The phenomenological approach gave philosophical shape to the basic existential insight that thinking about human existence requires new categories not found in the conceptual repertoire of ancient or modern thought; human beings can be understood

neither as substances with fixed properties, nor as subjects interacting with a world of objects. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Edmund Husserl used the term Phenomenology which is a philosophical movement. Phenomenologists are involved in investigating the underlying structures of consciousness and experience, typically emphasizing the crucial importance of the first-person perspective in understanding ourselves and the world around us. The intentional, first-person perspective — the way we actually experience life — is all too often stripped from our explanations of the world, phenomenologists argue, when it is accurately in examining this moment-to-moment, direct kind of experience that rich philosophical insight is to be found.

- Freedom:

Freedom is the most essential principle of Existentialism. It is believed that the principle of freedom gave existentialism its founding value. As originally defined by Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is the ethical theory that we ought to treat the freedom at the core of human existence as intrinsically valuable and the foundation of all other values." According to, Sartre "existence precedes essence". So it's totally up to us how will we use our existences to shape our own natures and values, and to create our own 'essence'. That means, on the existentialist view, we bear total responsibility for who we are, and what decisions we make. We are solely responsible for our own action. According to, John-Paul Sartre, "Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does". Freedom is usually presented positively but Sartre modelled that our level of freedom is so great it's "painful". To fully comprehend our freedom, we have to accept that only we are responsible for creating or failing to create our personal purpose. Without rules or order to guide us, we have so much choice that freedom is overwhelming. This personal responsibility to shape our own life's meaning carries significant anxiety-inducing weight. Many of us experience the so-called existential crisis where we find ourselves questioning our choices, career, relationships and the point of it all. We have so many options. How do we pick the right ones to create a meaningful and fulfilling life? In this regard, we can agree with Kierkegaard's thought, "that our existential freedom leads to anxiety about the limitless possibilities available to us". He discussed this in his 1844 work, *The Concept of Anxiety*. He stated there, "Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down. Hence, anxiety is the dizziness of

freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself.”

- Authenticity :

Once we've acknowledged the importance of the first-person perspective, and recognized the ultimate freedom we have in our lived existence moment-to-moment, we come to another core principle of existentialist philosophy: adopting a stance of authenticity. To overcome the anxiety and alienation that a recognition of our ultimate freedom and responsibility can cause in us, we should face up to who we are — including the fact that we are mortals who will one day die, and this is the ultimate truth. Noreen Khawaja stated in her work, *The Religion of Existence* that, “the idea of personal authenticity [is] at the center of existential thought.” The phrase “living authentically “is invented by Sartre. It means to live with the understanding of our responsibility to control our freedom despite the absurd. Any purpose or meaning in our life is created by us. If we choose to live by someone else's rules, be that anywhere between religion and the wishes of our parents, then we are refusing to accept the absurd. Sartre named this refusal “bad faith”, as we are choosing to live by someone else's definition of meaning and purpose – not our own.

To sum up, we can say that the philosophy of Existentialism involves three core principles and according to, the existentialist thinkers we are totally responsible for our actions and at the same time we create our own purpose through our action. Firstly, Existentialism includes a recognition of the foundational importance of the phenomenological, intentional first-person perspective in properly understanding ourselves and the world. Secondly, it refers to an acknowledgement of the freedom and responsibility we have in our existed experience. And finally, it defends the idea that personal authenticity is our main virtue, for it allows us to face up to who we are, live in harmony with the world, and thereby decrease our feelings of anxiety and alienation.

#### IV. EXISTENTIALISM AND ALBERT CAMUS :

Albert Camus used *The Outsider* as a podium to discover absurdity, a concept central to his writings and at the core of his treatment of questions about the meaning of life. However, Camus did not recognize himself as a philosopher. In fact, he avoided “armchair” philosophy and argued that sitting around and thinking was not enough. One needed to live life as well. He also did not recognize himself as an existentialist. He agreed with some proponents of existentialist

thought that life has no essential meaning, but he criticized others for their pursuit of personal meaning. Camus's concept of the absurd instead pleaded people to accept life's lack of meaning and rebel by rejoicing in what life does offer. In his novel *The Outsider*, through the character Meursault, Camus tried to show us the elements of meaninglessness. We observed in the novel that Meursault refuses to behave as if there is meaning where there is none—or, as Camus himself put it in a preface to *The Outsider*, Meursault “does not play the game.” Society thus feels endangered and cuts off Meursault's head. Similar themes can be seen in Camus's essay *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (*The Myth of Sisyphus*), which is published in 1942.

Camus himself rejected the label “Existentialist”, that means he does not consider him as a philosopher. He is not totally agree with the principles of Existentialism but his novel *The Outsider* reflects the themes of Existentialism in many ways. Camus describes himself as an artist and not a philosopher. He stated “I think according to words and not according to ideas” (Camus 1995, 113). Though Camus rejects being an Existentialist but some of his works indirectly reflect the ideas of Existentialism. Most of his works focus on absurdity and nothingness of life. There is a kind of confusing notion about Camus's philosophy. Camus argues that human beings cannot escape asking the question, “What is the meaning of existence?” Camus, however, denies that there is an answer to this question, and rejects every scientific, teleological, metaphysical, or human-created end that would provide an adequate answer. Thus, while accepting that human beings inevitably seek to understand life's purpose, Camus takes the skeptical position that the natural world, the universe, and the human enterprise remains silent about any such purpose. Since existence itself has no meaning, we must learn to bear an irresolvable emptiness. This paradoxical situation, then, between our impulse to ask ultimate questions and the impossibility of achieving any adequate answer, is what Camus calls the absurd. Camus's philosophy of the absurd explores the consequences arising from this basic paradox.

According to many existentialist thinkers, the greatest victory of the individual is to understand the absurdity of life and to accept it. Existentialism is liberating for those of us who do not rely on fate, God, or chance to guide us through the path of life. One aspect that is doubtful is our ability to continuously revive ourselves through our actions. And Camus's philosophy of absurdity is quite connected to this doubtfulness of Existentialism. Although Camus is not purely an

Existentialist but his philosophy of absurdity is somewhat related to the doctrines of the Existentialism.

### V. REFLECTION AND CONSEQUENCES OF INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM IN ALBERT CAMUS'S 'THE OUTSIDER':

The bewildering novel, *The Outsider* was first published in 1942. It is one of Albert Camus's most renowned novels. It was published as *The Outsider* in England and as *The Stranger* in the United States. It states the story of Meursault, an isolated young man who kills an Arab but refuses to show apologize for his actions, even when this means that he will be sentenced to death. It is known that, *The Outsider* is famous for its themes of existentialism and absurdist views. Existentialism is a school of philosophy that tries to deal with the fear or anxiety brought about by a seemingly insensible and meaningless world. The search for tenacity or meaning in a heartless universe is a key element of existentialism, and it arises as a key theme of play *The Outsider*. But Camus did not consider the book an existentialist novel. Absurdism can be considered as an extension of the philosophy of existentialism. It grips that pursuing meaning and order where none exists provokes conflict between the individual and the universe. In the absurdist view, accepting this meaninglessness is the only way to attain happiness and purpose. The central character Meursault rejects society's expectations and concludes that life lacks any real meaning. In this respect, he becomes the epitome of the text's philosophical themes.

In the novel we can see that, Meursault exists without any real connection to the world, just as he is a spectator who lacks any investment in his relationships. He barely meets his mother, he refuses to commit to Marie, and his friends and neighbors hardly know him at all. Meursault's idea of fun is sitting on his balcony and watch the rest of the world go by. He is a carefree individual, who does not care about any of society's norms and also fails to confirm to the law created by the society. To understand, the role and consequences of the Individual Freedom in human life we need to analyze each and every actions of the leading character of the novel, Meursault. We know that, individual existence, freedom and choice are the core principles of Existentialism. In this meaningless world, there is a distress on definite individual existence and freedom of choice. Certain aspects of existentialism are viewed in novel *The Outsider*. Through the

actions of Meursault, Camus tries to show us the role and consequences of the Individual Freedom in life. According to existentialist view, Mankind has free will and life is a series of choices. Our choices are sometimes irrational or absurd, without explanation. If we make a decision, then we must follow that. The decisions we make are whom we are, so we need to decide accordingly. In *The Outsider*, Meursault represents almost all of the essential themes of Existentialism. But the reflection of Freedom or individual choice is more prominent. According to existentialist view, Freedom means that whatever happened preceding to now do not influence what our next choice in life will be, we are free to make any choice we want. And if we analyze Meursault's action in the novel we will see same kind of view.

The leading character Meursault, is a Frenchman who lives in Algiers. His character reflects one of the core principles of Existentialism and that is Freedom. The novel is famous for its opening lines: "Mother died today. Or maybe it was yesterday, I don't know." These lines express Meursault's unwillingness to follow the basic terms of the social norms. After this introduction, the reader follows Meursault through the novel's first-person narration to Marengo, where he sits vigil at the place of his mother's death. Despite the expressions of anguish around him during his mother's funeral, Meursault does not show any outward signs of pain. In the novel, the character Meursault shows Freedom by just doing as he wishes to do. He is not like other human being who is abide by the rule of the society. He is carefree and very much reluctant to the laws of the society. While attending his mother's funeral, Meursault decides to smoke cigarettes, drink a cup of coffee, and he fails to show sentiment. This act of Meursault is exhibiting his free will; he does not let the influence of his mother dying effect what he wants to do. Meursault wants his life to be here and now, he is not bothered with the hereafter. Meursault wants the recollection of his life. Through this thinking Meursault displays Existence and Passion. We know that, life is unpredictable, prone to chance happenings, also to the unexpected. The novel, *The Outsider* tries to focus that ambiguity of the life. Meursault is so comfortable with walking back down to the spring unaware that he is going to end up destroying his happiness by shooting the Arab. This is a very unpredictable event because Meursault is just so happy and content with the sun shining on him, then all of a sudden something unexpected happens and his happiness is gone. "I knew that I had shattered the harmony of the day, the exceptional

silence of a beach where I'd been happy." Throughout the novel we see the reflection of Individual Freedom. In the beginning of the novel we see that Meursault is unwilling to follow the emotions of the society. His act of disobeying the norms of the society shows his carefree attitude. And this carefree attitude towards the laws of the society made him a free individual; an individual who lives his life with his own choice and also rejects being a part of the group, a group created by the society. In the last part of the novel we see that, Meursault's action reflects the essence of individuality. In the end of the novel, Meursault desires a large crowd of people to be present at his death, and he also wants them to greet him with cries, but those of hate. "I had only wished that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate."

So it is quite obvious that, by being hated Meursault holds his individuality and this is the act of free will. Meursault does not follow the conventional norms of the society. He does not beg for forgiveness; he does not even care to apologize. By rejecting the norms of the society he follows his own will or choices. And this made him different from the others. In the novel we see that, he refuses to become a member of a collectivity. One of the important themes in *The Outsider*, is that life is absurd. The leading character Meursault's absurd beliefs are that life is pointless and without purpose. To Meursault everything is pointless. And his attitude towards life made him a free individual who is totally different from others. Through the actions of the Meursault Camus tries to show us the meaninglessness of life. Camus's *The Outsider* presents the character of Meursault who, after killing an Arab, is sentenced to death. This conflict depicts the plain contrast between the morals of society and Meursault's evident lack of them; he is condemned to death, less for the Arab's murder, than for refusing to conform to society's standards. From the very beginning of the novel we can see that Meursault totally rejects the doctrines of the society and never really takes responsibility for his actions, all Meursault does is wish that his life could go back to the way it used to be. Meursault is a difference in society; he cannot recount directly to others because he does not live as they do. He cannot endure by the same moral restrictions as the rest of the world because he does not grasp them; he is mostly indifferent to events occurring around him. Meursault's entire being is detached. He gets a certain level of pleasure from eating and drinking, smoking cigarettes, sitting on his balcony. He is not

emotionally attached to things around him. Physical satisfaction is more important to him. His attitude towards the people and things around him made him an individual who is not abide by the laws of the society.

He is not bothered about anything and he takes things as it comes. Life or death, and anything in between, makes no difference to him. His lack of emotion makes him different from others. The character, Meursault represents the absurdist view, explaining the philosophy of existentialism: Man's remoteness among an indifferent universe. There is no essential meaning in life – its entire value lies in living itself. Through the leading character Meursault, Albert Camus tries to convey the essential principles of Existentialism; Freedom, in many ways. The notion of Existentialism is echoed through Meursault's experiences with his mother's death, his relationship with Marie, the killing of the Arab, and his own trial and execution. Camus uses the death of Meursault's mother to express his existentialistic philosophy. Meursault is totally clam and quite at his mother's funeral. He does not show any emotion at his mother's funeral. He does not even cry and does not behave the way the society expects him to. And this is the sign that he is indifferent and he is willingly rejecting the doctrines of the society. This kind of act is not acceptable by the society. As an existentialist, Meursault takes life as it is without seeking deeper meaning. This is his way of living the life which makes him different from the society. And this is one of the important examples of the reflection of the Individual Freedom in the novel.

Meursault's relation with Marie is also another example of his carefree nature. It can be defined as another example of the Existentialism. He is not emotionally attached to her because he lacks compassion. He does not believe in stability. To him, everything is temporary and meaningless; there is no purpose in life. So, he is a kind of character who is not ready to take any sort of responsibility. He follows his own rules and he does not want to conform to the laws of the society. Meursault's murder of the Arab is a prominent example of Existentialism; the act of Free will. This act of free will shows how Meursault is not only an outsider to his experiences in life, but also to nature. For the first time, the sun and his sensual pleasures begin to act against him, and cause him to lose control. Most of Meursault's actions have no true conscious purposes. Meursault shoots the Arab because of his physical discomfort with his surroundings. When he is taken into police custody, he refuses to say anything. He refuses to

apologize. He accepts the reality that he murdered a man and is now ready to face the consequences. He always takes responsibility for his own actions. After the incident, Meursault is waiting for his trial with a clam manner. Meursault is put in jail and is waiting for his trial. He is not on trial for the crime, but is on trial for his values, like the lack of grumble of his mother's death. Meursault is found guilty and he is condemned and sentenced because of his lack of ethical feelings. While waiting for his execution, he thinks about how his life has no meaning besides just living and how death does not panic him. He realizes that life is pointless and the world is unreasonable. This feeling of emptiness makes him happy and he accepts his death. It is obvious that Meursault is an outsider to society and at the same time he is also an outsider to himself. He seems untouched by his mother's death, the killing of the Arab, and his trial. Being an outsider to himself, he leads to the final meaning, which is a stranger to life. At the end of the novel Meursault is able to realize the meaning of life. During the trial Meursault realizes the real purpose of life because he is approaching death, which is an existentialist principle; death is the one certainty of life. He realizes that one can truly enjoy his or her life when he or she approaches and accepts death. Albert Camus's philosophy in the novel can be related to the philosophy of Existentialism, which strains that the individual is solely responsible for the choices he or she makes, there is no prearrangement and there is no supreme being who decides morality.

## VI. CONCLUSION :

The principles of Existentialism is reflected in almost all of the novels of Albert Camus. Existential question and absurd realities have been fundamental parts of the protagonist's character. Through the leading character Meursault, Camus portrays a character whose lifestyle and actions are closer to the principles of Existentialism. Meursault does not hide his personality from the world of law and from the society. He does not play the game of the society like others. And this made him a free individual. His beliefs and his self-serving instincts help him to keep himself away from the corrupting games of the society. Being a part of the society, he refuses to play the game and he chooses his own path. But society never accepts this kind of attitude. Society considers such behavior as crime and the person who rejects the norms of the society is a criminal. So, in that sense, the protagonist Meursault is guilty; the guilty of not crying at his mother's funeral, not showing any emotion towards anyone,

not lying in the court. By rejecting all the norms of the society, he fails to play the game. And this is the act of free will, which makes him different from the others; makes him an individual.

Meursault's behavior is considered to be unusual because of his actions and his lack of emotion to events that take place around him such as his mother's funeral and his court trial. Meursault's indifference to life, causes him to appear as an outsider in society and to the people that he relates with. He is not interested to understand what is going on in his surroundings which adds to his indifference and detachment from the rest of the world. In the novel we view that when Meursault gets news of his mother's death, he is generally detached and unresponsive which reveals to the reader that he is heartless and cold. His lack of emotions during the court trial is also shows his heartless image. His different observation of life is what made him be an outsider to the rest of society. During his court trial, Meursault shows a lack of repentance which leads the prosecuting attorney to view him as a heartless man. Meursault's lack of general emotions in every aspects of life represents him as an indifferent person. We have seen in the novel that he is unable to show any form of compassion to the killing of the Arab man. His general detachment to the Arab's killing shows how Meursault is different from others. His responses are totally different from what is anticipated by society under such a situation. While an ordinary human being would react to the court proceedings with feelings of redemption and guilt, but Meursault chooses to show lack of any emotions. By showing such behavior he became a free individual; an outsider who is not willing to follow the laws of the society. So through the character Meursault, Albert Camus tries to portray a man who is emotionless and detached from the rest of the society.

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